

[By Jenna Pizzi](#)

Rep. Peter Welch was undeterred by rain Saturday, taking full advantage of Vermont Days to go fishing on Lake Champlain.

Across the state, wet weather greeted the two-day event sponsored by the state to encourage locals and visitors to use state parks. Saturday and Sunday, admission to state parks, historical sites and the Vermont History Museum is free.

Unfortunately, Saturday was the only day for free fishing.

While Welch admits he is not much of an angler, the rain did not dampen his spirits any.

The congressman said his dad took him fishing when he was young, but he hasn't cast a line much since then.

"We didn't get any bites," said Welch upon returning to the dry land of Mallets Bay boat ramp in Colchester. "But I learned you don't need to catch a fish to have a good time fishing."

Welch had better luck coming up with answers to pressing statewide issues.

A very wet spring has flooded many state parks along the lakeshore and caused fear of contaminated waters due to flooded water treatment facilities, failed septic systems and flooded fields.

Welch said he wanted to encourage Vermonters to support local businesses that have taken a

hit because they have been flooded or are not seeing as much traffic through their doors due to inclement weather.

Welch said he hopes President Barack Obama will issue a disaster declaration soon to help the businesses and homeowners that have been harmed by the flood to move on and rebuild.

Welch, who hand-delivered a letter to the president last week asking him to declare Vermont eligible for Federal Emergency Management Assistance, said he does not know when the declaration will come, but hopes it might be as early as next week.

The Department of Health gave the OK to swim at all marked swimming areas on Friday, saying that testing done by the state showed the e coli levels to be well below harmful levels.

Algae tests were also done and the levels were deemed safe by University of Vermont scientists, according to the Department of Health.

"At this point, the test results are showing us that if it is a designated swimming area, go ahead, get wet, enjoy the water, be safe, be healthy and have fun," said Craig Whipple, director of Vermont State Parks.

Welch echoed Whipple's sentiments at the end of his fishing outing, encouraging people to come out and enjoy the lake.

"The high water levels and flooding have led people to thinking that the lake isn't accessible, but it is accessible," Welch said.

The state did advise that tests were only completed in designated swimming areas and it is unknown if undesignated areas are safe for people to use. The Department of Health advised it will continue to test until the entire lake is cleared of any threat from high levels of bacteria.

Lake Champlain is in flood stage forcing the state to keep some parks closed. As of Friday, Sand Bar State Park, Burton Island, Knight Island, Woods Island, Kill Kare and Alberg Dunes remain closed.